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# THE ROLE OF MEDIALABS IN REGIONAL CULTURAL AND INNOVATIVE POLICY

ANDRZEJ KLIMCZUK

*Purpose of this article is to introduce the concept of a new cultural institution, "medialab". Media laboratory is an interdisciplinary institution that combines the tasks of scientific, educational, cultural and artistic institutions. They are spaces in which technology and digital media are designed. Article introduces the main features of medialabs and possible public tasks in the field of regional cultural policy and innovation policy. It also draws attention to the challenges and barriers in the organization and management of these centers.*

*creative industries; cultural policy; innovation policy; interdisciplinary institutions; technology transfer*

## 1. Introduction

Beginning of the 21st century is characterized by dissemination of creative economy model. Three factors indicated by R. Florida in his creative class and capital theory have an increasingly importance to the socio-economic development at the local and regional: technology, talent and tolerance. They can be stimulated by new cultural institutions, called "medialabs" (media laboratories), which are interdisciplinary institutions combining tasks of traditional scientific, educational, cultural and artistic institutions. Medialabs both new and modernized cultural centers like libraries, community centers and business incubators, open spaces offices. The purpose of this article is to bring closer main features and possible public tasks of medialabs from the perspective of regional cultural policy and innovation policy. Based on the conducted research findings challenges and barriers of medialabs organization and management will be indicated.

## 2. Concepts and examples of interdisciplinary cultural institutions

Medialabs are understood here as the institutions in which technology and digital media are designed. They also serve to taking actions of positive transformation intergenerational ties (compare: Filiciak, Tarkowski 2010: 91-93; Klimczuk 2010a,b; Tarkowski, Filiciak, Jałosińska 2011). Building of these institutions results from: (1) work and leisure time changes, (2) emphasis on the adaptation of cultural institutions to digital technologies and new media, (3) transformation of intellectual property rights system, as well as (4) the devel-

opment of silver economy through “intergenerational projects” to adapt products and services to an ageing population (Klimczuk 2011).

N. Negroponte and J. Wiesner, scientists from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, are considered as authors’ of the medialab idea. In the 80s 20th century they are trying to create space where new media and technologies will be mixed during research and development. In 1985 year from their initiative MIT Media Lab was established – it is a center of cooperation of engineers, designers, developers, educators, entertainers and artists. Nowadays within its framework are run, eg works in the field of: visual culture, civil media, liquid interfaces, technologies of bottom-up local development, education facilitating sounds, personal robots, and information ecology (MIT 2013).

Various models and synonyms terms to medialabs have already been created<sup>1</sup>. These institutions are characterized by: (1) open spaces used for experiments, the exchange of knowledge and craft; (2) engagement of commercial, academic and civil society entities; as well as (3) democratic and participative management. These institutions can be used eg to: (1) media education not only in the passive use of the media, but also for the construction and programming of digital technologies (Stunža 2010; Hofmokr et al. 2011: 61-62); (2) support the development of a “digital/future culture” by digitization of heritage resources (Tarkowski 2009); (3) stimulate local and regional development (Celiński 2011); (4) development of creative industries included in the systems of technology transfer and commercialization of knowledge (compare: Matusiak, Guliński 2010: 76-77; Bomba 2011); as well as (5) generate different forms of capital and social, economic and political order (Klimczuk 2010a).

Medialabs allowing community achieving many benefits. These include: (1) stimulating the production of content in the networks and management of scarce resources (human creativity, time and attention, processing power and communication technologies); (2) obtaining the positive effects of social capital impact; (3) design of various types of social, economic and technological innovations. These benefits are possible by stimulating the convergence of new media and technology; synergy effects from the use of medialabs participants diversity; sharing of experiences; reciprocation of support, trust and willingness to risk; as well as inspiring environment (compare: Haase 2000: 425-430). Medialabs internal stakeholders are: their organizers, supporting institutions, sponsors, authors of projects developed in medialab and their collaborators. While external are: local communities; academia, arts, public, commercial and non-governmental institutions of education, labor market, education; users of social and cultural goods and services; advertisers; providers of hardware and network infrastructure; and mass media.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to term “medialab” are also used terms such as: fablab, bricolab, future centers, thinklab, idealab, hackerspace, skunkworks, coworking offices, co-labs. We can distinguish at least three types of entities to which these terms are used. First, the visual studios, advertising and interactive agencies company's using the open space offices. Secondly, computer labs, multimedia corners of libraries, municipal cultural institutions, business incubators, institutes or departments of universities and R&D units. Thirdly, informal bottom up groups and non-governmental organizations taking actions in different areas - from running café-bar and gallery, through the implementation of technological research and social projects, to the promotion of open licenses usage (Klimczuk 2010a).

An example of the construction of medialabs may be a part of project carried out in urban renewal Grand Front, Osaka, Japan (Asada, Ishiguro 2010; KC 2013). „Knowledge Capital Zone” is a center which opening is scheduled for 2013, but gradually is developed within the annual workshops since 2009. Center is aimed at cooperation between administrations, businesses, scientists, designers, artists and users of goods and services. These entities are building center for their creativity and technology exchange, to improve it, presentation, and testing, as well as to commercialize it and achieve new intellectual values. Whole is complemented by digital culture laboratories run with the Austrian Ars Electronica Futurelab which is developed since the 80s 20th century. Knowledge Capital Zone will contain also medialab called „RoboCity Core”. It will be associated with the RooBO network, which was established in 2004 by the city of Osaka. The network has around 107 companies and 337 individual members working on experiments with use of robots in different spheres of life, RoboCup competitions and cyberculture.

Undertaken in Poland actions to development of medialabs are primarily: government’s “Strategy for the Development of Social Capital,” assuming specific support on intergenerational projects and programs of cultural institutions modernization. Since 2010 dissemination and attempt to build a Polish model of medialabs is engaged by Ortus Foundation and Digital Centre Project:Poland (LK 2013; OK 2013). Concept are promoted by institutions associated with the movement of free and open culture, science, education and software, mainly in the cities of Warsaw, Gdańsk, Katowice and Lodz.

### **3. Medialabs in regional cultural and innovation policy - challenges and barriers**

In January of 2013 Ortus and SocLab Foundations Poland carried out a study evaluating the current efforts of medialabs building, which was co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (Klimczuk 2013). During study survey among people involved in the last three years in workshops preparing medialabs was conducted as well as among those who wishing to take part in such preparations. In the study participated 52 people - 34 participants and 18 non-participants. Also carried out 5 Individual Telephone Interviews and Desk Research. Below are presented selected findings from research.

According to respondents, the potential tasks of medialab should be primarily: conducting workshops on new media (73,1%); incubating innovation in culture, economy and science (61,5%); cooperation with cultural institutions (57,7%); the development and enhancement of creativity (57,7%); cooperation with scientific institutions (51,9%); cooperation with educational institutions (50%); organizing artistic activities (48,1%), reduction of the digital divide (40,4%), and solution to social problems using a new media (40,4%). In determining the tasks of medialab more attention should be paid to the long-term and sustainable impact on the external environment. Currently neglected actions include: construction of international cooperation, development of a regional system of creative industries, promotion of multiculturalism, openness and the region, including the digitization of administration and supporting ecoculture.

A wide range of activities is reflected in the potential departments, sections of this institutions. Medialab should contain: fablab - laboratory, place to prototype innovative products (61,5%); artistic studio (55,8%); innovation incubator (53,8%); culture center (46,2%); design center (44,2%); artistic residency (44,2%); business incubator (42,3%); craft workshop (40,4%); technology transfer center (40,4%); and center of social activity (38,5%) and the house of creative work (38,5%). Emphasis on practical, proactive activities is already paid, rather than passive reception of culture and participate in training. Medialab however, should be more oriented towards the transfer of technology and robotics center.

Respondents were asked to rate on a scale from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree") opinion on the possibility of creating permanent medialab institutions. Highest rated the following: "In Poland medialab institution is necessary" (average 4,8); "At this time, medialab institution may arise in Poland" and "In Poland, the whole medialabs network is needed" (4,6); "At this time, whole medialab network may arise in Poland" (4,4); "medialabs should be established and located in each in Poland voivodship" (4,3). It is necessary to increase the activities for the promotion of a permanent medialab institution, breaking stereotype of absence of opportunities to create and build medialabs networks. It is appropriate to highlight benefits of development medialabs in border areas.

The main opportunities for development of medialabs include: border crossing of cultures, disciplines and styles of art (55,8%); supporting innovation in the field of science, culture and economy (53,8%); better use of new media and technology (42,3%); and international cooperation (23,1%). As a threats are perceived: difficulties in obtaining financing (48,1%); difficulties in operation at the crossroads the public, private and non-governmental entities (40,4%); and lack of permanent results of projects developed in medialabs (40,4%). It is therefore appropriate to create medialab development strategy with taking into account complexity of global environment, possibility of building interdisciplinary, cross-cultural and cross-border collaboration. Study points out need to build a network of contacts and a strategy for financing and promoting medialab sustainability.

#### **4. Organization and management of medialabs**

The survey concerned also questions aimed at seeking answers about how individuals and institutions should be responsible for the medialab organization and management. According to the respondents, these tasks should belong mainly to the: non-governmental cultural institutions (75%); public cultural institutions (63,5%); academic and research institutions (61,5%); and cultural animators (53,8%). Funding of medialabs, should be instead respond: The Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and government agencies (75%); local authorities (55,8%); and business (53,8%). Is reasonably to work on limiting stereotypes about cooperation of medialabs with business and commercial institutions. More attention should be paid to the possibility of sharing the cost of running and financing of these institutions.

An important element in the further development of medialabs is to create appropriate instruments of their organizational and administrative support. According to the re-

spondents it should be: using solutions, technologies developed in medialab (76,9%); inclusion medialab to collaborative networks (eg of innovation, cultural institutions) (75%); take into account medialab in the atlases of good practice guides and guides (48,1%); outsourcing public tasks for medialab (46,2%); promoting medialabs social campaigns (40,4%). Creating a permanent medialab institution should include marketing strategy, which will be an important part of working with the various levels of government and commercial organizations. It is also necessary to take into account the interests of public departments for the innovation, culture, promotion and development of tourism.

When it comes to financial support instruments for medialabs in respondents opinion the most important are: grants from public, commercial and non-governmental institutions (80,8%); crowdfunding (eg Kickstarter) (65,4%); venture philanthropy (44,2%); public-social-private partnership (42,3%); long-term sponsorship, part of corporate social responsibility (42,3%). Calling into question these opinions should be acknowledged that it is necessary to move away from casual to permanent sources of financing medialabs institutions - seeking strategic partners and building networks with users of medialab works.

## 5. Conclusions

Article bring closer features a new type of cultural institution known as medialab. Basic concepts, benefits, and examples of such institutions have been discussed. In particular, paper discusses the activities in Poland from last few years. Selected findings from their own research were presented. Potential medialab tasks, departments, relationship to the environment were discussed as well as challenges and barriers in development. Essay raised the issue of organization and management of medialabs such as their sectoral links, funding sources as well as instruments of administrative and financial support.

It is reasonable to further popularize the medialab concept and adapt its types to the local and regional contexts. Future research should in particular focus on their role in exchange and international cooperation in the transfer of knowledge, skills and technology. Important is also ongoing development of interdisciplinary models of those institutions management, keeping in mind its decentralized and virtual organizational structures. It is important to study their interorganizational relationships and ways of reaching out to their beneficiaries.

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